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Praal, F.E.W.

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TXT Magazine • Centuries of TeXT (2023)

Celebrating a Decade of TXT: Anniversary Introduction to the Xth Issue

Fleur Praal

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The MA Book and Digital Media Studies of Leiden University is proud to here present *TXT* X – the tenth issue of its student-led annual publication. This second lustrum is a notable achievement that testifies to BDMS students’ sustained commitment and continued engagement, as editorial teams have risen to the occasion every year, for a decade now. *TXT* stands in an even longer tradition: departmental newsletters *The Galleys* (in the nineties) and *Ezelsoor* (‘Dog’s Ear’, in the zeroes) were the xeroxed precursors to annual, student-led publications in print. Such yearbook-magazines, dubbed *EDiT* in 2011, *RE_* in 2012, and *Yapp* in 2013, stabilized into the current concept, with its title and logo. *TXT* got assigned its own ISSN in 2014. Based on this registration, really, we now celebrate the Xth anniversary – apt, perhaps, in the age of data.

It goes without saying that *TXT* X is a stand-alone collectible, embodying the current editorial team’s perspective. Its editors have been drafted from the student cohort, like every year, to form a board that is in charge of the full publication process that takes the most of an academic year: from setting a topic, to announcing a call for papers, soliciting contributions, reviewing submissions, editing articles, designing the presentation, and launching the issue in style – all this extracurricular activity is no small feat, with the admirable result now in the reader’s hands.

Several important constants can be found in this issue, reflecting a recognizable concept and making for a coherent series. Most importantly, perhaps, *TXT* has always provided a platform for a wonderfully inspiring mix of key pieces by internationally established academics (Paul Hoftijzer and Adriaan van der Weel as our now-emeriti professors, but also Anne Mangen, or Michael Bhaskar, to name just a few) and ambitious young voices working on their dissertation or thesis – all this sprinkled with engaging perspectives from outside academia. The contents in the current issue-X are no exception. Similarly constant has been the magnanimity with which professionals from the library and publishing world have in turns lent a hand to new recruits; *TXT* can gratefully boast a history of sponsoring or co-publishing agreements with Brill, Van Duuren Media, Elsevier, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Amsterdam University Press, and Boom | Eleven. We are much obliged to Leiden University Library for offering its generous support, facilities, and expertise to the current issue.

Despite offering invaluable practical assistance with the publication process where needed, our professional partners have always supported the editorial teams to shape their own issue, in content and form. In each iteration of *TXT*, thoughtful creativity shines through in its particular way. In hindsight one can say, perhaps unduly teleologically, that issues 1-5 (or: I-V) established the *TXT* archetype: these issues present playful takes on traditional typography, often with a few bold complementary font colours in print. Their contents comprise playful variations on conventional academic genres: interviews, columns, or short book reviews mixed with scholarly articles.

After the first lustrum, Issue VI, on ‘The art of reading’, offers no colour beyond black and white, but weaves through its textual content a thread of custom-designed drawings of readers, applying themselves to their arts. Issue VII, ‘Diving into Digital’, plays with the notion that markup is supposed to separate form and content, as

XML tags, which are normally rendered invisible in the presentation of a text, here are typographic design elements. The ‘Pandemic Papers’, as issue VIII is titled, contrasts the abnormal remoteness of the editorial process in lockdown with personal reflection pieces by students and scholars; its black and pink design reverberates their escapist tendency and irony. ‘The Open Issue’, IX, contrastingly breathes hope and a broad horizon. It was the first to call for artworks alongside its scholarly contributions, an invitation that the current Xth volume has extended.

The theme for this issue, ‘Centuries of TeXT’, reminds the reader that books may live an awe-inspiringly long life. This notion prompts reflection on a shelf with ten consecutive issues of TXTs (and with space reserved for more), as a burgeoning collection that must capture the spirit of the MA. In a series, the sum of the modest, yet carefully designed booklets (and the accompanying PDFs in the university repository) amount to more than its ten parts. Each issue has its own emphasis, and balances imitation with amelioration – the desire to fit in the series with the aspiration to stand out from it. This duality is only human, of course, but it may be intensified by our students’ reflexive self-awareness through their immersion in the study of the book. After all, they usually study publications; taking charge of publishing one offers a wholly new, complementary perspective.

This year’s issue further celebrates its anniversary with an artisanal dust jacket (for the first 100 lucky recipients), hand-printed on APL’s Vandercook printing press, a hidden gem in the Lipsius basement. Somewhat curiously, for an MA programme that prides itself in studying the book in its manuscript, print, and digital forms – and that teaches text encoding technologies – all ten issues of TXT are very firmly material objects: printed pages in cardboard covers. The book world increasingly embraces the affordances that the digital medium offers for publications – interactivity, for instance, or a multimodal reading experience. TXT has stored PDF files facilitating for worldwide open access through Leiden University’s repository (via: <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/28849>). Yet these digital derivatives are still simple and static, and reading them only mimics the experience of print. Foremost, this shows that despite digital developments in the past decade, an immense gratification has apparently remained in producing a material object that can be held, touched, sniffed and leafed through.

Admittedly, the paper copy also easily beats a digital equivalent when gifted as an extended business card for the department. Reflecting the MA programme’s international recruitment, and scholarly and professional connections, TXT can already be found on shelves in the book world from Canada to Australia, and from Mexico to Thailand. As gifts, keepsakes, souvenirs, and the fruits of hard work, hundreds of copies of a decade of TXT continue to spin a web of book scholarship from Leiden. Let’s celebrate this achievement – cheers to the promise of centuries of text.

Fleur Praal

Leiden University Lecturer at the

Book and Digital Media Studies
Masters programme